



South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



LT. GOVERNOR VISITS SDDVA CLAIMS OFFICE



While in Sioux Falls this past week, Lt. Governor Matt Michels visited the SDDVA Claims Office.

While there, the Lt. Governor thanked the staff for the work they do to guide and assist our veterans and their families in obtaining their benefits.

Lt. Gov. Michels also presented one of his coins to Joe Leasure of our team and thanked him for his service to this great country.

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SPOOKS VISIT STATE VETERANS HOME



Residents at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home had the opportunity to visit the “spook house” that was designed and created by staff at the Home.

After touring the spook house, residents had to chance to partake in the Halloween party, and to handout treats to all the trick-or-treaters.

Festivities included apple spearing, toilet papering staff to look like mummies, and passing the pumpkin.

Special thanks to all the staff and the volunteers for making this such a special day for our heroes.



MORE SPOOKS AT THE HOME



COALITION LAUNCHES TASK FORCE TO INCREASE HOME OWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS

The South Dakota Native Homeownership Coalition announced the formation of a new committee that will work to increase access to homeownership resources for Native American Veterans. The committee will be co-chaired by South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary, Larry Zimmerman, and Manaja Hill, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's Veteran Service Officer. The working group will be focusing on veterans' homeownership matters and specifically address housing stock, land issues, homebuyer education, and subsidies.

"The key step for this committee is bringing the tribes and the state together," says Secretary Zimmerman.

Hill explains that there are many resources for Native American veterans available, but committee members have found that, in some cases, veterans are not aware of the all of financial and housing counseling resources available that would make their homeownership goals more attainable.

"We will be connecting all of the programs with the specific needs of the veteran," Hill says. This would include programs available through the tribe, county or state, federal government, and the network of organizations that promote homeownership opportunities in Native communities through the Coalition.

In order to do this, the committee will produce guides that will serve as a centralized information resource for South Dakota's Native American veterans. In order to be more accessible, the guides will use "veteran's lingo" says Secretary Zimmerman who is a veteran himself. Hill, also a veteran, adds that information in the guides will be categorized by each of the state's nine tribes since "tribes are not cookie cutter," and each offers unique benefits.

Hill hopes that their work will be used as a model by other states to help even more veterans. He believes that low-income rental programs "are the foundation of poverty" and that "our veterans deserve more." He says, "Homeownership gives our veterans a sense of pride. They have something to take care of. These are things that they are familiar with from being in the service."

The Coalition launched the Native Veterans Homeownership Committee during its planning session as a pre-cursor to the South Dakota Housing Development Authority's 26th Annual Housing Conference. The planning session was attended by nearly 100 individuals from tribal, state, and federal agencies, as well as nonprofit organizations, colleges, and financial institutions. In addition to the launch of the veterans' committee, the pre-conference event also included working groups that will shape the Coalition's activities for the next year, and informational sessions on the Coalition's new statewide impact tracking system for homeownership practitioners and housing needs assessments conducted recently on the Cheyenne River and Rosebud Reservations.



VA AND SOCIAL SECURITY PARTNER TO SPEED-UP DISABILITY DECISIONS FOR VETERANS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) launched a new Health IT initiative that enables the VA to share medical records electronically with social security disability processors. This secure process will save time and money resulting in better service for veterans and dependents who apply for social security disability benefits. The SSA requests nearly 15 million medical records from health care organizations yearly to make medical decisions on about three million disability claims. For decades, SSA obtained medical records through a manual process. This new national initiative puts in place an automated process to obtain veterans' medical records entirely electronically.

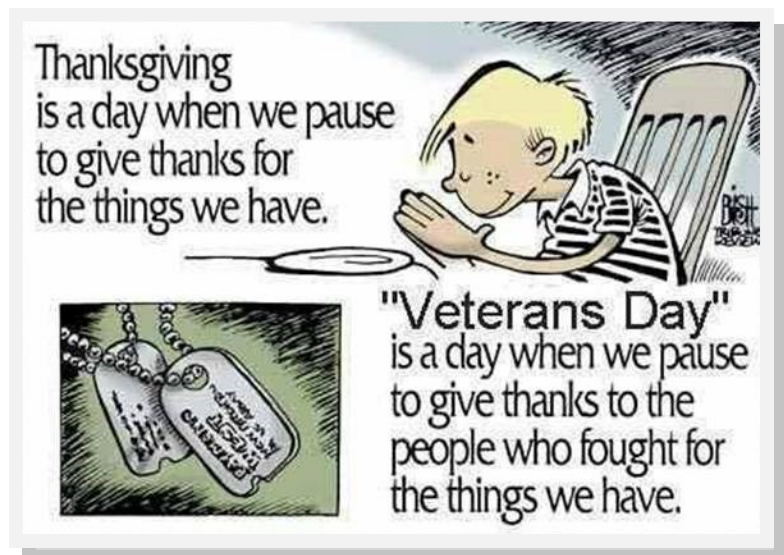
"The VA's partnership with Social Security will ultimately improve the quality of life for veterans and their dependents by enabling veterans to share their health information within a safe and secure health-related consumer application," said Dr. David Shulkin, the VA's Under Secretary for Health.

The joint venture is expected to significantly speed up social security disability decisions, utilizing VA's [VLER Health Exchange](#) under the [Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record \(VLER\)](#) Program. The VLER Health Exchange gives the VA and participating community providers the ability to retrieve veterans' health information from each other for the purpose of treatment. Currently, VLER Health Exchange shares health data with over 79 community health care partners, representing 775 hospitals, 427 federally qualified health centers, 142 nursing homes, 8441 pharmacies and over 11,969 clinics. The SSA now has access for the purpose of processing benefits for veterans and their dependents.

"This SSA-VA partnership is another example of the VA's leadership in interoperability efforts among federal partners," said VA Secretary, Robert McDonald. "Increasing federal partnerships to improve operation and resource coordination across agencies is among VA's 12 Breakthrough Priorities for 2016."

The VA has partnership agreements with Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Treasury (DOT) among many others.

To learn more about VA health care visit: www.va.gov/health.



UPDATE FROM STANDING ROCK SIOUX TRIBE

On November 3, 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Department of Veterans Affairs hosted a ceremony to announce a federal grant for a veteran's cemetery and recognized its newest tribal veteran's service officer. The ceremony included the SRS Tribal Chairman, Dave Archambault, SRST DVA Director, Manaja Hill, and new Tribal Service Officer, Navy Veteran Kevin Jameson. Also participating, were VA National Cemetery Director, George Eisenbach and Program Manager, Howard Orr, and SDDVA West River Field Officer, Will Huffman.

The ceremony kicked off with the posting of the colors and ceremonial drums and singing from the SRST ceremonial drum/song team. Chairman Archambault read and presented a certification for Kevin's completion of the VA's Compensated Work Therapy Program under which he was initially hired to begin training in the position. Second, a citation was read recognizing his service as a veteran and his completing of all requirements to be certified by the tribe. Lastly, Will Huffman described the process and dedication it takes to become an accredited veteran's service officer and presented him with his completion certificate from SDDVA's annual training course.

Among the comments made about Kevin, his citation reinforced all that he has done to support and assist SRST Veterans. Will Huffman explained, during his comments, "For all we can teach him in a classroom, and of all the things Manaja and I can show him through OJT, Kevin possesses, in wealth, the one thing we can't teach. That is his spirit of service. That comes built in. That is what impressed me when I met him a year ago and what will be at the core of his success as he goes forward."

The ceremony then turned its attention to announcing the award of the grant for the All Nations Veterans Cemetery. NCA Director Eisenbach noted that "Chairman Archambault and Manaja Hill have worked very hard to get this grant and their patience and fortitude have paid off. As this cemetery is built, we are committed to being with you every step of the way."

Chairman Archambault added, "We worked hard and had to overcome a couple obstacles but, we did it. With the award of this grant, we will be able to create an honored burial ground for veterans, by veterans." In addition, he commented, "This cemetery will be built with renewable energy sources and materials to ensure a low carbon footprint and self-sustainability going into the future."

The ceremony closed with an honoring song by drum/song team and the retirement of the colors. Immediately following the ceremony was a planning meeting for the new cemetery.

VETERANS TO BE HONORED AT NCAA DIVISION II VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Sanford Pentagon will be hosting the NCAA Division II volleyball championship match on Dec. 10 at 5 p.m. They would like to invite area veterans and their families to be honored and attend for free! They would like veterans to come to the VIP door at 4:00 pm and there will be a meet and greet with the players before the game. Veterans will be honored during the game and presented a challenge coin. Watch for more details.



VABHHCS TO HOST VETERAN STAND DOWN

The VA Black Hills Health Care System (VABHHCS) will host a Veteran Stand Down on Thursday November 10, 2016. The event is open to all veterans and their families from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, Rushmore Hall, C&D. Goodwill of the Great Plains will provide the meal at the event.

The focus of the Stand Down is to reach out to veterans who are homeless or at-risk for homelessness. "Over thirty of our community partners and a dozen VA departments will be on hand to help veterans access a broad range of specialized resources and services aimed at breaking the destructive cycle of homelessness", said Jamison Hild, Health Care for Homeless Veterans program staff, VA BHHCS, "A Stand Down is a great opportunity to connect veterans to the services and the benefits they've earned and deserve."

Veterans will find helpful information and on-the-spot services. VA Black Hills staff will offer basic health screenings and flu shots and stylists from The Man Salon will give haircuts. Veterans can ask questions and receive immediate assistance on VA benefits, special programs, legal assistance, and health care enrollment. To help prepare for winter, personal items such as cold weather clothing, blankets, hygiene kits, and duffel bags will be available.

SDDVA's Will Huffmon will have a booth at the Stand Down and will be prepared to assist veterans and their families.

VA NATIONAL CALL CENTER PLANNED FOR HOT SPRINGS

The VA Black Hills Health Care System and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Member Services are working together to expand call center services to veterans. VHA Member Services sought out the VA Black Hills Health Care System, Hot Springs campus for space to accommodate VA employees who will provide services to veterans and their beneficiaries through call center support for eligibility, enrollment, and pharmacy-related inquiries.

VHA Member Services will begin recruiting efforts mid-November to fill 120 positions for a new call center to be located in Buildings 3 and 4 on the Hot Springs campus. VHA Member Services anticipates the call center will have a positive impact on the VA Black Hills Health Care System, Hot Springs campus and the surrounding community. Current plans call for new employees to begin training in January 2017.

The Hot Springs facility has adequate space to fulfill the need for call center operations, according to Ryan Heiman, Strategic Planning Officer, VHA Member Services. Currently, Member Services operates out of facilities in Atlanta, GA.; Canandaigua, NY; Topeka, KS.; Waco, TX; Fort Riley, KS.; with various staff working virtually throughout the continental United States.

A large number of the positions will be filled using the federal government's veteran preference and Schedule A Hiring Authority recruitment options that provides Federal agencies a non-competitive option to hire qualified individuals with disabilities. Positions include contact representatives and supervisors from within VHA Member Services. New employees will be eligible to receive comprehensive benefits packages, paid leave, and flexible work schedules. The VA encourages potential applicants to visit www.usajobs.gov to learn more about veteran preference and Schedule A Hiring Authority recruitment programs.

Specific positions will be posted at on the USA Jobs site as they become available.

SDDVA SPONSORS REFRESHER TRAINING FOR CTVSO'S

This week the SDDVA staff conducted our annual refresher training for the newer CTVSOs. Tours were provided of the SDDVA Claims Office, the Regional Office and the SF VA Hospital.

Staff provided training on the SDDVA website, state benefits, VetraSpec, FDC compensation claims, FDC Nonservice connected pension, FDC death pension, DIC, ChampVA, NODs, BVA appeals, and burial benefits.



HAPPY VETERANS DAY

Take A Moment To Thank A Veteran
When you see someone in a uniform
Someone who serves us all,
Doing military duty,
Answering their country's call,
Take a moment to thank them
For protecting what you hold dear;
Tell them you are proud of them;
Make it very clear.
Just tap them on the shoulder,
Give a smile, and say,
"Thanks for what you're doing;
To keep us safe in the USA!"
By Joanna Fuchs



For all of those not wearing the uniform, thank you for what you've done to garner and protect our safety and our freedom!

Upcoming Events

Nov. 12—Tribute to the Troops—SD Air and Space Museum Ellsworth AFB—9:00 am (MT)
Nov. 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters in Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
Dec. 6—SDDVA Mini Conference—Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home—Hot Springs (Lower Level Conference Room)—10:00 am—3:00 pm (MT)
Dec. 6—Governor's Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)
Dec. 7—SDDVA Mini Conference—Post 8 American Legion—Pierre—10:00 am—3:00 pm—(CT)
Dec. 8—SDDVA Mini Conference—VFW (209 Cedar Street) Yankton—10:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)
Dec. 12—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony—Flaming Fountain—Capitol Lake—Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
Dec. 14—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Sioux Falls DAV—12:00 noon (CT)
Dec. 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Watertown American legion—12:00 noon (CT)
Dec. 17—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Rapid City VFW—10:00 am (MT)

2017

Jan. 10 - Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)
Jan. 11—SDDVA/Veterans Council Legislative Reception—5:00 pm—8:00 pm (CT)
Jan. 30—VFW Legislative Reception—AmericInn—Fort Pierre
Feb. 1—American Legion Legislative Reception—American Legion Post 8 Cabin—Pierre (520 S. Pierre Street) - 5:30 pm (CT)
Feb. 4—Valentines for Veterans Concert—Sioux Falls Washington Pavilion—3:00 pm (CT)
Feb 10-12—SD American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Oacoma
Jun 15-18—SD American Legion State Conference—Watertown

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer
South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>
Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501
Phone: 605-773-8242
E-mail address: audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

